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**Onscreen user documentation**

1. What is the nature of onscreen user documentation?

Onscreen user documentation is information to provide guidance to users. It explains how to use a product or perform a procedure with the product. Its structure and layout must be logical so the user can easily follow the instructions.

1. List the 3 functions of onscreen user documentation?
2. A user may refer to onscreen user documentation for instructions on accessing and using features of new programs or devices.
3. A user in a workplace can refer for information on company procedures and policies in their information system.
4. If a problem occurs while using the product, the user can refer for a help guide or manual to find a solution.

**Types of onscreen user documentation:**

1. User guides and instruction manuals
   1. What is the purpose of these guides?

Their purpose is to inform and instruct the user about the characteristics, capabilities and functions of the hardware or software. These will detail how to begin to use the program, and how to perform typical actions with the product. They also include safety warnings and guidelines for safe operations.

* 1. What are the two popular formats for onscreen user guides? Why?

The two formats for onscreen guides are portable document format (PDF) or hypertext (web based). Both support graphics and are small in file size. They can both be accessed on a wide variety of platforms or operating systems, are readily available for free and can be printed for offline viewing.

* 1. What is a third party user guide?

A third party guide is a guide that is produced by a company not associated with the developers and acts as an additional guide, often provided as a free promotion of the product.

Describe the characteristics of the following types of onscreen user documentation.

1. Quick start guides

Quick start guides give brief, simple instructions on how to begin using the product, and how to perform basic actions such as saving, printing, etc. They are presented as brief text or hypertext instructions with accompanying diagrams. They usually have links to further tutorials or information, either stored on CD/DVDs or on the internet.

1. In-house user documentation

The guides allow employees of an organisation to use an information system, including protocols for the particular organisation such as access, security, file-naming etc. There may also be onscreen guides for customised information products within the company, such as a database of company clients. These may be PDF files or hypertext that can be stored on an intranet for read only browsing.

1. Read me files

These are provided by the manufacturers which contain information such as system requirements, configuration settings, troubleshooting strategies etc. They are intended to be read while installing a product and can be accessed on screen or viewed in a browser.

1. Tutorials

Tutorials consist of step-by-step instructions for using features and functions of a product. They may include text or graphics in a PDF or hypertext format, or provided in a series of media files with sound, animation, etc. These are used to ‘talk the user through’ the process. They may be included on the product CD or accessed from the manufacturer’s website.

1. Help files

Help files provide searchable information about the features and functions of a software application or device. They can be extensive, providing an overview of a variety of topics as well as detailed examples and tutorials. They usually include a contents or index section for navigation, and may also include a glossary for specialised terms.

1. Web support

Web support is help offered directly from the manufacturer’s website, which often is hyperlinked to the software involved. They will have FAQ sections, a knowledge base, troubleshooting and how to upgrade the product. The may also include a ‘tech talk’ section where solutions for known bugs are stored. Web support may also be community based or posed as a forum, where users of the product can contribute to finding and solving problems with the system.

1. Tool tips & hint boxes

These provide content sensitive help in understanding and using the product. Tool tips are a window that appears when hovering the mouse over a particular function of the application giving its name and function, and hint boxes appear when clicking on a function to describe what the function does and in some cases a diagram with how to use it.